

Lenore and I

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BY

JAMES F. SAYER

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LENORE AND I.

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A LOVE STORY IN VERSE

BY

JAMES F. SAYER



NEW YORK
THE ESKDALE PRESS

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LENORE AND I.

I LOVED Lenore when little more
Of years had come than half-a-score.
You smile, and say, "The hearts of boys
Are set on sweetmeats, sports and toys."
I know not what your hearts may tell,—
I but relate what me befell
When, new to school, her voice and eyes
And ways did me imparadise.

At every vision that the turn
Of school affairs of her did give,
Did I the more intensely yearn
A-near her radiant form to live.
For she, when first I entered school,—
From new-made clearings, poor in dress
And cultured ways, and in distress
Of mind at my reception cool

From giggling girls, and boys that jeered—
My guardian angel proved to be.
When on the scene Lenore appeared,
She turned at once reproving glance,
As sharp and piercing as a lance,
On my tormentors,—then on me
She beamed, the soul of charity.

Beneath her fostering kindness I
Of more than friendship saw no token.
To me she gentle was and shy,
As modest maids are. All unbroken
The silence 'tween us, till more bold
In time I grew ; and tell-tale looks
That stole to her from off my books,
My deepest, holiest, secret told.
Then, as we often met my chance,
(For so we made it seem, you know,)
Within her eye was softer glance,
And on her cheek a rosier glow.
I distanced soon each jealous swain
Who saw my bliss, in brawn and brain.
And in my class stood by the same
Brave girl who at the first became
My guardian angel. Being rare !
Haloed with sunny silken hair

That veiled a neck of tinted snow,
And rippled to a waist below
That would have thrilled a palsied arm.
No form more lovely ever trod
With footfall light the flowering sod ;
So light the daisies felt no harm.

Those happy school days hurried on,
The terms and years, till all were gone,
Flew past, and, by divergent ways,
We homeward went, in pensive maze
Of feelings, gravely wondering when
Our paths would reunite again.
She welcome found among her kin
In village home where long had been
A love for learning, art, and all
The mind-embellishers that fall
To lot of those whom temperance
And thrift have given a competence.

Not such had my surroundings been.
Yet coming back, I found my kin
With goods increased. To amplitude
Had grown the primal log-house rude.
To it were added spreading wings,
Which signified awakenings

To larger life on higher plane.
While I was bent my mind to train
In distant academic halls,
Had fallen back the barky walls
That hemmed the first home-clearing in.
The sun could earlier begin
To kiss the morning-glories trained
Across the casement ; later strained
The sunlight through the western trees.
For year on year by slow degrees
My stalwart kin, with ax and brand,
Pressed back the giants of the land
That ages long, with laurels crowned,
Had sovereignized o'er all the ground.
The ancient, kingly forest trees,
With many a sharp, despairing groan,
Were in their glory overthrown,
And none to chant their obsequies ;
Was only heard the roar of fire,
As requiem, from their funeral pyre.

In place of the receding lines
Of beeches, maples, oaks, and pines,
The blank to fill, the eye to please,
Stood row on row of orchard trees ;

A variously bannered band
To ward off famine from the land,
To furnish pasture for the bees,
And keyboards for the playing breeze,—
Fair parks set off with jeweled wings,
All resonant with carolings.

These fruitful parks o'er hill and dale
Advanced along the blackened trail
Of woods retreating, while between
Did gardens march, and meads of green,
Dispensing luxuries and rest,
As on they tended to the west.

Beyond the burnt-out new-cleared space
Often with meditative pace
I entered the primeval wood,
And like a marveling pigmy stood
'Neath vast arboreal canopies,
The handiwork of centuries ;
'Neath sproutings of a hundred Springs,
A hundred Autumns' harvestings ;
Grand resurrections from the dust
Of former growths, that towered just

As proudly, proving Nature's plan
To be impartial. Since began
The march of time, both high and low
Must to a common level go,
And intermingle, and again
Uprise through growth. What once was
man,

In Nature's wondrous alchemy
May reappear in flower or tree ;
Or live again (if Nature wills,)
In worm, or beauteous bird that thrills
The mornings. Aye, the sage's mould
May turn to creatures for whom gold
Is everything ; and dust of fool
May rise in founder of a school.

And yet but lightly did I pore
On Nature's face ; to me far more
Delight was in the thought of her
Who had more charms than ever were
In greenwood brook, faun-haunted glade,
Or moonlit waters e'er displayed.
Without Lenore was even June
All incomplete, and out of tune.
Her smile, and glance, and shining hair
Could make December seem right fair.

'Twas ecstasy in sylvan wild,
In days of old, for Nature's child
To meet his counterpart and tell
Of love's unending miracle ;
To stroll with her, unseen, unheard
By prying eye or ear, and word,
And act his feelings fond,—but my
Environment did me deny
Such rapture. Distance held apart
Me and the holder of my heart.
“And when,” thought I, “we meet again
Heart-prompting ways we must restrain.
Our scenes of courtship must be laid
On lawns and carpets, not in glade,
Or pathless wood, or lonely dell,”—
But still my memory served me well.
Her dear remembered image thrilled
My heart at all times ; where I willed
In all my ramblings lone to go
I nodded to her phantom so,
That had one seen me at the time,
He might have thought in pantomime
I was addressing one unseen.
By feigning thus my heart's own queen
So softly gliding by my side
My joys were doubly multiplied.

There are times when our present surround-
ings appear
Unlovely and cheerless, when fancy is
strong
And we sweetly commune with, as if they
were near,
All the beautiful beings that memory throng.

There are times when we live in a far-away
spring ;
When we thrill at the whispers that fell on
our ear
In the long, long ago, when the clasps to us
cling
Of a hand that's been ashes for many a year.

There are times when the lover rehearses
the charms
Of the far away maid, and reharvests the
bliss
Again and again that he felt when his arms
Encircled her form and kiss bartered for kiss.

Still again there are times when the fancy is
faint,
And loveliness wearies and ceases to glow,

Remembrance, when nothing will stop the
complaint
Or the heart-ache but love's real endear-
ments to know.

So, tired of musing and of roving
Alone, and further for the proving
The constancy of my Lenore
By other means than by her lore
Of love within each missive sweet,
Which was my choicest weekly treat,
I ventured (after long time bracing
My courage up and frequent facing
Before my mirror, and oft combing
Of wayward locks, and careful grooming
Of hopeful hints of mustache coming,
The while a plaintive love-stave humming,
When not composing or repeating
Enamoring speeches for the meeting),
To seek her face among her kin,
And courtship formally begin.

A cordial welcome I received.
I fully was at once relieved
Of all the apprehensive fears
That I had entertained for years,—

Fears of a stern and haughty sire
Refusing me my heart's desire,
Of want of favor in the mother,
Of small inquisitorial brother,
Of favored cousin's lack of grace
In yielding up his wonted place
Beside his kin for tête-à-têtes,
In angry terms denouncing fate's
Decree, that maid must kinsman leave,
And closer to a stranger cleave ;
Of maiden aunt's reproving shake
Of head, and censure, if should make
Two ardent souls 'neath Cupid's goad,
A move unwritten in the code,
Of stately ways ; of sudden choking
At brusque and jolly uncle's joking
Mid the confusion that must rise
When lovers' breasts are filled with sighs
Suppressed and useless tongues are tied,
And eyes downcast, and faces dyed
With hues that like to posters flaming
But advertise the accurate aiming
Of Cupid's stinging, wounding darts,—
Lenore so mollified these smarts
Of lovers by her winsome ways
That courtship had no hard delays,

But, deeper than it first began,
The course of love all smoothly ran,
And bore us with its luring power
To often meet within her bower,—
Her moonlit bower, where did arise
To mine her full betrothing eyes,
And fall her kindling face, and rove
Replies so archly far from love.

But sterner work than with Lenore
To meet by moonlight, was in store.
Secession down from Sumter tore
Our flag, and loud our Chieftain cried
For loyal men to breast the tide
Of war that must our land divide.
No second summons did I need ;
I mounted quick my petted steed,
My beauteous black, and swiftly flew
To bid my love Lenore adieu,
Ere going to the tented field.
Her love-lit, loyal face revealed
Approval ; an unbidden tear
Uprose. She stayed the tide of fear,
And calmly said : “ Among the brave
Go forth, my knight, our flag to save.”

I waved farewell, the spurs applied,
And O, that stirring, warward ride !
I stroked my courser. "Soon you'll hear,"
Said I, "from bugle loud and clear
The call to charge, and you must go
In open field to meet the foe ;
But when the while you're onward dashing,
Above your head the sabers flashing,
War's thunderbolts your pathway gashing,
A leaden tempest round your ears,
And 'neath the volley's smoke appears
The foemen's steel athwart your way,
Be not dismayed ; a brighter day
Shall on you shine, if from the gloom
Of war you bear your master home,
While shout the throngs and beat the drums,
' Behold ! the conquering hero comes. ' "

Played as I sped the strange prelude
Of earnest war. Batallions rude
Were forming on the village squares ;
The breezes wafted martial airs ;
And many were the flag-poles new ;
Like masts upon the ship of state
They rose, with sails red, white and blue ;
The ship of state made all elate

While being manned for victory
Upon Rebellion's dangerous sea.

Soon as I reached Potomac's shore,
Back flew a missive to Lenore,
And what a brave response it drew !
Then back and forth our every new
Love-laden thought, that day by day
We felt, we sent without delay.

And year on year the bloody game
Of war progressed. Promotion came—
But as my growing squadrons bore
My name to fame o'er fields of gore,
My heedless and unknighly heart,
Enraptured with the warrior's art,
Alas ! did less devotion pour
Through *billet-doux* to lone Lenore.

Ere long I learned he sorely mars
His peace who strives for martial stars.
As stepping-stones to what seems higher,
Man treads too often in the mire
His best possessions. Though I won
Distinction rare, I was undone.
What mattered glory, when did end
Her letter short, "Lenore, your friend" ?

Ah me ! Lenore, she little knew
That she had pierced me through and
through.

For "friend" when used in right relation
Breathes trust, affection, admiration,
But all it yields can never cover
The ecstasy that wells from "lover."
And yet was I the one to blame
That love in her had lost its flame.

Hope ever is a lifter-up
Of visions, sweetening every cup
Of bitterness, and does our fears
Dissolve with rainbow-weaving tears.
And so I hoped, when war was o'er,
To meet and win again Lenore.

As time went on the growing tide
Of carnage flowed from side to side.
At times advanced the stars and bars,
Then fell and rose the stripes and stars.
Each rose and fell, while victory flew
From side to side, like restless bird
That knows not where to build her nest.
More gloomy still the conflict grew
Till rung above the din, a word—
A word that long had been repressed,

A word that Sumner tried to teach,
That Phillips strove to sound in speech,
That Garrison abroad did fling ;
That Whittier, strong in verse, did sing ;
That Stowe made " Uncle Tom " recite ;
That Brown in blood did boldly write ;
A word that an awakened North
From cannon's mouth now thundered forth :
" No more shall Freedom's emblem wave
Above the cowering trampled slave,
All shall be free ! " New vigor ran
Along our lines, for now began
A warfare for the rights of man.

When Slavery's legal shield was gone
More grandly rolled the conquest on.
Post after post before us fell,
And fainter grew the rebel yell ;
And bondmen, as we paved their way
To liberty, did homage pay.

A dusky dame, whom years three score
Of servitude had wrinkled o'er, —
Her brow begirt with kerchief white,
And waving one to win our sight,
As from the old slave-planted post
Of master's gate she hailed our host

That swept along on Lee's retreat,—
She poured on us this blessing sweet,
Over and over did repeat :
“ De Lor' be praised, de Lor' bress ye,
We knowed you'd come and make us free.”
Rare benediction ! Who can tell
The glory that upon us fell ?
She voiced the gratitude that thrilled
Four million hearts. Not vainly spilled
Our loyal blood. With joyous feet
We flew along on Lee's retreat.
We walled him round with battle blows,
Till o'er his famous legions rose,
Surrender's signal, pledge that peace
Had come, that fratricide should cease.

Lenore mused thus ere yet was done
The carnage, and the triumph won :
“ How long, how long, will dove-like peace
Delay ? Ah me ! Will never cease
These heartaches that we women feel ?
Though far away from hostile steel,
Of war we know the keenest smart.
The men are brave ; they bear their part
In mood heroic ; but the charms
Of brilliant trappings, gleaming arms,

Emblazoned banners, throbbing strains
Of music to the battle plains
Escort them, while we, to the quick
Our hearts pierced through by news of slain
And prisoned brothers, must remain,
To scrape the lint, and nurse the sick ;—
Those who were by the battle-wave
O'ercome, and sent to us to save.
We, widowed, orphaned, waste our bloom
Of life unlabeled, and in gloom.

Yet uncomplainingly I'd bear
All this, were *he* not in the snare
Of strong Ambition. Since his feet,
Led on by that alluring cheat,
So proudly tread the height of fame,
Me he neglects, and in my stead
Courts martial glory, while I'm wed
To heavier grief than words can name.

But grief o'er me shall not hold sway.
I'll cover all my hurt away
'Neath smiles and songs. Should he deplore
His cruel course, and on his knees
Pour out his penitential pleas,
In pardoning grace he'll find me poor.

Warm maids betrothed, he'll surely learn,
Beneath neglect to ice will turn.

When smoke of war had cleared away ;
All burnished stood our brave array,
Like brilliant iris after storm.
But quickly fades the rain-bow's form
To common light, and mingles free
And hueless in the ethereal sea ;
So melted quick each martial hue ;
Our army grand dissolved from view.
Quickly we glided from the glare
Of arms victorious to the fair
Calm sea of life, upon whose breast
Arose the isles of home, all dressed
In loveliness and peace and rest.

But some to no home-raptures came ;
Weep not for them ! they softly sleep
Within the embalming arms of fame.
Yet over those might angels weep,
Who still alone must wait life through
Before they greet their boys in blue,—
To such your tenderest thoughts are due.

Oft deck the mounds o'er which they weep,
With all the fairest flowers that blow,
And weave the memories that they keep
Into the sweetest songs that flow
From tuneful lips, for tender strain
And flowers somewhat allay their pain.

But other greeting was for me,
I thought, beside the grand parade
And welcomes at the home-hearth made,
That would my crowning rapture be.
“Now for Lenore I will prepare
My presence with minutest care,”
Said I. “Her lover she anew
In his blue star-decked robe shall view ;
And with impassioned voice I'll ask
Her pardon,—just a formal task.
My coolness to her love I deem
Like some obstruction in a stream ;
Remove the bar, with gathered force
The waters rush their wonted course :
My absence ended, on, I know,
Her love reserved will deeper flow
With all the constancy of yore
For me alone,—I ask no more.”

Then, ardent as a boy at play,
I on my noble bounding bay—
Rode forth,—for my heroic black
From Gettysburg came never back.
As toward Lenore I sped with glee,
The eastward creeping shadows lay
By house and hill, by spire and tree,
And crouching till the sun would stay
His arrows bright, and cease to smite
Her path, did wait the swarthy night
To fold these shades upon her breast,
Thus oft had we by battle pressed,
Low-lying waited, till our foe
Like sunset flame had ceased to glow,
To reach each stricken comrade's side,
To help and healing him provide.

“What joy,” mused I, “again to fly,
As free as eagle in the sky ;
O'er hill and dale, without the fear
Of deadly danger drawing near ;
Lest every swell and wood may smoke,
And flash forth hissing battle-stroke.
For here, from Nature's many throats,
Are heard the soothing, mellow notes

Of peace. The lowing of the herds,
Maternal bleating from the hills,
And liquid love-notes of the birds,
And merry voices of the rills.
While from the flower-bordered doors
And casements of the cottage, pours
The heart's own music,—lullabies
To lure coy sleep to infants' eyes."

The heart's own music, at the springs
Of being sung! O how it rings
Adown the ages! Woman blest
Unto the nursling of her breast
Forever sings it, as her eye
Divines her babe's high destiny,
As bringer of a golden time,
As occult seer, or bard sublime,
As champion of noble cause,
Or framer of millennial laws,
As paragon of every grace,
The first perfected of our race.

As nearer to Lenore I came,
A mellow mood o'erflowed my frame,
Rare peace within my heart was rife,
I thought of love as Lord of life,

And love-lit home as labor's end,
"To such attainment now shall tend
My constant toil ; to her I'll show "
Said I, "an Eden still below."

'Neath cloud of tinted mist to view,
Now came the scene where doth enroll
(Moved by the veiled Eternal's hand),
That foam-embossed, self-chanting scroll
Of music,—grand Niagara ! Fanned
By mist-cooled zephyrs ; on I flew,
(No time for exaltation due) ;
For past the crystal-castled home
Of grandeur, built of water-bloom,
And trimmed with rainbows, was a scene
More dear, the bower of my queen.

Before the heaven-tending gale,
The bark flies with full-blossomed sail,
And so I sped her face to greet.
But as on unsuspected rock
That vessel drives, and from the shock
Drifts reft and torn, a wreck complete,
So from her coldness on were borne
My blasted hopes ; to shreds were torn

The scenes that fairy fancy wove
Around the meeting with my love.

I sought Niagara's moonlit face,
But the enchantment could not chase
The gloom away that rose before
My eyes, remembering that Lenore
Had told me I had lost my claim
To call her by endearing name.

That bitter hour! How envious-eyed
I met those faces glorified
By love! The newly-wed were there,
Who traced with gentle words the ways
They wended in the yearning days,
Ere Hymen did his feast prepare;
And downy youth with budding maid,
Between whom Cupid coyly played;
Thrilling their frames to finger-tips,
Delaying still to voice their lips.
And veterans scarce beyond their teens,
Old for their years, passed in review
Their scars, escapes, and prison scenes;
For eager ears of maidens true,
Of whom in camp they'd mused and dreamed.
I only of that throng, it seemed,

Was lonely, rankling sorrow's own.
I—who in years ago had known
With rare Lenore, on such an eve,
The rapture that o'erflowed in song,—
Now felt my feet had done me wrong
To lead where youth and beauty throng,
For now I could but sigh and weave
Dark reveries.

Just then my heart
Was pierced again ; there stood, apart,
Lenore with one of manners bland,
Who served with me in my command.
I was disguised ; they knew me not ;
I sought a near secluded spot.
The fav'ring shadows veiled me well,
While friendly moonbeams on them fell ;
Yet was I near enough to glean
From his address and ardent mien
He sought to win her for his own.
How eagerly I scanned her face,
For sign of yielding mood to trace !
But there for him small favor shone.
And presently he spoke my name,
For what intent I did not hear.
Suffused her face a rosy flame,
Then lightning-like did disappear.

What doth it mean ? thought I. Do still
Live embers in her heart remain
Of that dear, old-time love ? And will
They stir at my mere name again ?
For she had firmly told me *no* ;
A sudden ray of hope shot through
My frame ; but then, what could I do ?
Helpless was I ! They turned to go ;
The groups dispersed ; and I alone
Was left to make my bitter moan.

And much it means to be alone
With old Niagara and the night,
While smarting from a loss that quite
O'erwhelms the soul ! I lay there prone
Above th' abyss, on trembling verge,
Lamenting fate's austere decrees ;
Paying my mournful obsequies
To buried hopes. My wearied mind,
Bewildered, sought in vain to find
A way whereby I could emerge
From misery's mazes, save to leap
Clear from life's tangle o'er the steep,—
To snap at once the galling chain
Of life. At one majestic bound
To solve the mysteries profound
Of Death's unhistoried domain.

I rose to plunge forevermore
From life into th' abysmal roar—
The prelude to an end of pain,—
Just then came flashing back again
Through memory's hall the roseate flame
That lit her face, when he my name
To her an hour before had spoken ;
And I was saved ; the spell was broken.
I found my feet ; with bated breath
I fled the gorgeous gulf of death.

I sought my restless champing steed,
And homeward sped with utmost speed.
Beneath me how the highway flowed !
With leaping sparks the gravel glowed.
The trees rushed past like routed men,
The hedges, over hill and glen
Like huge affrighted serpents ran ;
The sleeping air awoke to fan
My burning brow ; and answered back
The groves my courser's click-a-clack.

I sought my couch ; among my dreams
My sorrow roamed, till on my ear
Burst *reveille* from chanticleer,
And shone Aurora's rosy beams

As rosy as the hues that wore
My face the hopeful morn before.
Then, startling me, my mirror true
Flashed forth a face of ashen hue.
So worn it was as if life's race
For weeks had been in hurried pace.

Alas, 'twas only that Lenore
Had me disowned the eve before !
I seized my pen, and pled that she
Would reconsider her decree
Of banishment ; but all in vain.
The days like pilgrims deaf and dumb
Strolled cheerless by. Slow weeks did come
And go in hues of funeral train.
Long months crawled past with snail-like
speed ;—
Of all my pleas she took no heed.

I bravely wore a face untrue,—
Like fruit that wears a healthy hue
Upon its rind, while at its core
The worm doth gnaw :—'twas thus I bore
A look that did belie the grief
Within, from which was no relief.
My loss did me so overwhelm,
I could not find a joyful realm

Of thought or feeling; all in vain
My wounded pride rehearsed the strain :

“Sorrow not for the loss of a maiden whose
 eyes
 No longer enraptured, with love on thee
 shine ;
For maidens are many as stars in the skies ;
 One star may lose luster ; yet never
 repine,
For myriads remain, and sparkle by night
As clearly as when thy lost orb gave its
 light.

“Why sigh for the lips that no longer will
 bless
 Thy wooing with kisses and whispers of
 love ?
For maidens are many who wait the caress
 Of a lover ; be hopeful ; a new love may
 prove
More sweet, aye, the bloom in another
 maid's bower
 More honey may yield than thy first
 cherished flower.

“ Why grieve o’er the loss of a maiden
 whose voice
 No more for thy pleasure doth melody
 pour ?

For maidens are many as birds, that rejoice
 When morning comes blushing the dewy
 hills o’er.

Of the numberless warblers that dwell in
 the grove,
 Can the song of but one bird to rapture
 thee move ?

“ Why long for the maid who no longer
 doth turn

Her cheeks into roses in Hesper-lit hour
 To garland thy bosom ? A fairer may yearn
 To bloom for a lover, as yearneth the
 flower,

All night in the gloom folded up and for-
 lorn,

To blush in its beauty and welcome the
 morn.”

But as I said, it was in vain ;
 My heart rehearsed another strain :

“ Though maidens outnumber the jewels
that burn

In the all-shielding azurine roof of the
night,

Away from the millions unsated I turn,

Away from their glances, to gaze on the
light

Of one beautiful, magical pair of blue eyes
That shone on the scene of my lost Para-
dise.

“ Though maidens are many as singers
that fill

The forests and orchards and meadows
with song,

From them and their voices (though angels
might thrill

At the marvelous sweetness to them that
belong),

I turn me to drink in the music that falls

From the one maiden's lips, in dear mem-
ory's halls.

“ Though maidens outnumber the cloudlets
that sail

In fanciful figures to garnish the sky,

But one of their number for me can unveil
 A beauty that ever enraptures the eye ;
 Though me she disowns, escape can I never
 Her marvelous graces, they haunt me
 forever.

“ Though maidens are many as streamlets
 that play
 In the pastures and meadows when winter
 is o’er,
 But one of their number can ever allay
 My feverish longing. No beauties can
 more
 Than cause deeper sighs for the heart-thrill-
 ing beams
 Of the one unapproachable maid of my
 dreams.”

But when the tardy sun did roam
 Less high and bold within the dome
 Of Heaven ; and when with mournful sighs
 Were filled the winds, and loud did rise
 The plaint of streams that wildly flew
 The flower-deserted valleys through ;
 When thus was Nature out of tune,
 I went one sombre afternoon,

To stroll within a neighboring wood
Which like a grand memorial stood
Of a departed solitude ;
Or like a pleasing interlude,
Upon the march of tillage,—there
I threw me down in deep despair.
On Nature's rustling lap alone
I cheerless lay, with inward moan
And prayer that Heaven would make it plain
How to allay unending pain.

Unending pain ! There is a balm
For fleshly ills. There is a calm
Beyond the storm for those who sail
Before the canvas-rending gale.
Ovations wait beyond the fight
For victors. Vanquished, after flight,
Find friends and safety. For unpursd,
And hungry, overcome by thirst
Do larders open, fountains play.
Belated travelers find the way
Still open. Chill by morning's glance
Is slain ; while fairy moonbeams dance
Again in quiet on the floor
Of waters that the tempest tore

To tatters. Aye, there is a calm
Succeeding tumult, and a balm
For fleshly ills. Then for the smart
Of a forsaken wounded heart
Is there no healing? "Why does one,"
I asked, "when manhood's just begun,
Feel incomplete, and faint of heart,
And pine for weaker counterpart,
Cease in selfism to rejoice,
And sigh for but one other voice
Among the myriads just as sweet?
One smile to win, one face to greet,
All thorny ways, and storms, and waves
He joyously and rashly braves.
One clasp of hand, one cheek a-blush
Are more to him than wildest crush
Of throngs him cheering. Highest prize
Soft glances from one pair of eyes.
Two rosy parted proffered lips
Are more to him than all the ships
That e'er came in from over seas.
And then, alas! the loss of these
Allurements for him hath alarms
Appalling more than all the harms
Of shipwreck, or of prison chains,
Or thirst, or hunger, deathly pains

Of battle-fields, diseases dire,
Or loss by flood, or storm, or fire,
Or lack of friends, or being cursed
By raving rabbles. Fortune's worst
Is when rejection evermore
To heart's desire has shut the door."

When I arose, the sky had cleared,
The wind had died, the west appeared—
Both sky and hills—as bright as gold ;
Upon my homeward pathway rolled
A flood of glory, and the while
Pervaded every open aisle
Of all the wood,—an omen bright
Of good appeared that feast of light.
How strangely then to me there came
This precept, thrilling all my frame :

" He who would rest from sorrow, know,
Must ever keep his ear inclined
To others' moans ; their cups of woe
Must taste ; then will he surely find
That his own sorrow much hath lost
Of bitterness." The thought was old,
But if an angel then had crossed
My path, and me the same had told,

It could not have impressed me more.
How strange it had not come before
On eager wings, this truth so trite,
My weary, darksome life to light.

As from a service full of sweet
Ennobling thoughts, in speech or song,
In hope I homeward turned my feet,
Resolved to join the noble throng
Of toilers for the common good.
Just as had sunk from sight the sun,
And stars were coming one by one,
I reached the margin of the wood.
There cultured meads were mine. My hand
Had helped to drive, with axe and brand,
The tangled wild away. Once blest
Was I in planning there to rest,
(Lenore my consort,) and enjoy
The fruit of sweat-anointed toil
Of early years ; with naught to roil
The stream of life ; my sweet employ
To dress the garden, train the vine
Beside the doorway's rustic seat,
From which to view my meadows fine,
My herds and fields of golden wheat

And tasseled corn without a care
To mark my brow or blanch my hair !
But when one's longing is denied,
Of what avail are harvests wide,
Or flocks and fruits with none to share
Around the board these bounties rare,—
No wife, with looks and converse sweet,
Or babes to consecrate the meat ?
As little could the organ please
With none to animate the keys ;
Or showerless clouds, above the plain,
With everything athirst for rain ;
Or seat at feast, with song and toast,
Without the chiefest guest or host.

As forth I went, angelic mien
Was mine to some whose larders lean
Were stored again ; and joy was seen
In looks that answered back the flame
Of hearths replenished ; then became
The coal more worth than diamonds bright,
Eld's hoarded sunshine brought to light.
Erect I saw the crouching form
Once more within a mantle warm,
And faces lost their lines of pain
When healing cordials came. Again

Starved minds did feast ; no time to tell
 The many marvels that befell.
 The wounds of fortune grew more light,
 My griefs were less as I the blight
 From other hearts removed. More worth
 And joy for me possessed the earth,
 As I fulfilled the creed divine
 That every man is brother mine,
 And that to every one is given
 The power to turn a hell to heaven.

Speed on the day
 When men will lay
 To heart the needs of neighbors ;
 And count it joy
 Without alloy,
 To bless another's labors.

The tempest-tossed
 Need not be lost,
 If we would not forsake them.
 There'd be no dearth
 Of loaves on earth,
 If men would, Christ-like, break them.

The many shapes
Of those "sour grapes,"
That make poor mortals sadder,
Might yield the wine
Of life divine,
Would we but lend a ladder.

Now Spring, from out the Everglades
Of Florida, and fragrant shades
Of orange groves, did venture forth
To send her heralds to the North.
With fragrant, flowery flags of green,
And strains of music, soon was seen
Her coming. 'Neath her magic spell
State after State before her fell.
On, on she swept until the tents
Of winter, stained and full of rents,
That last remained along the shore
Of old Saint Lawrence, vanished ; o'er
Victoria's realm triumphant trod
The recreating power of God.

When came July whose flaming eye
Did wilt the corn, and fields of rye
Turn into lakes of wavy gold ;
And when the thirsting lips of mould

Did crack, and when did panting rove
The herds, to 'scape the noontide heat,
Into the shadows of the grove,
I turned my hot and weary feet
From battling weeds, among the corn
And vines that did the fields adorn,
Toward the broad and breezy lakes
And river, where the throng betakes
Itself awhile, new strength to gain
For garnering coming harvests' grain.

Rare River St. Lawrence ! Imperial band
Of embroidery rich on the marge of our
land !
Bejeweled, and burnished, and flashing the
dyes
Of borders historic and beautiful skies !

Peerless plaisance of summer ! The home
of the breeze
On the crystalline currents from unsalted
seas !
Where the transports of commerce are lost
in the play
Of the navies of pleasure that garland the
way.

Renewers of youth are your islands, caressed
By cool airs and clear waters ; and haunts of
the blessed
Are all your flotillas, suspended between
Two marvelous heavens, in settings of
green.

Now when the Nation's birthday came,
And streets with flags were all aflame,
I drifted with the crowd. I went
Among enchanted Isles. Was bent
Each one to fill the day with pleasures,
Amid display and stirring measures
Of music. Blithely as we sailed,
Another pleasure-barge we hailed,
Then met, and closely glided by
Each other. O'er the railing I
Leaned out to learn if to the throng,
Some face familiar did belong.
Ne'er was more blessed explorer's eye !
My loved Lenore I did espy
The fluttering handkerchiefs among.
As closer to the rail she clung
Her eyes met mine. A sudden start
And flush (how wildly beat my heart !)

I saw a penetrating look,—
And then a flying streamer took
Her face from view. By me stood one
Whose silver hair in years ago
I thought that I had looked upon
A near her home ; his features wore
A kindly look ; I craving more
To learn of her in any way
That would my purpose not betray,
Did softly ask him if he knew
Aught of the throng that in review
Had passed. Said he, “I recognized
A former friend ; but how surprised
And flushed she looked !” “Perchance the
same
I saw,” said I, “Pray, what’s her name ?”
“Lenore,—the peerless,—yet unwed !
’Tis strange ! Her loveliness hath led
Rare suitors to her, but her hand
No more is sought ; all understand
’Tis useless and ungallant now
To pain her ear with lover’s vow.
No more, methinks, of marriage bells
She muses, and no more she dwells
On thoughts of conquest, or on all
The kindred thoughts that hold in thrall

The girlish mind. To tell the truth,
'Tis said she loved a famous youth ;
But that the strong mysterious hand
Of fate dissolved the roseate band
Of early, ardent love. Serene
She moves among us as the queen
Of all our hearts. Now is expelled
All dross that e'er her being held ;
And now doth go her saintly feet
On errands so divine and sweet,
On ministries that are by Heaven
To less than angels never given."

He ceased ! Thought I, "The being rare
That he has painted once was mine,
But now she's even more divine
Than when it was her dearest care
Her warmest welcomes to prepare
For me. My heavenward growth, I ween,
Beside her own is small and mean ;
Henceforth let me adore from far
Her saintliness, and never jar
Her life serene with even a word
Of my devotion to her !" Heard
We now the harbor's voice ; the day
Of pleasure ended at the Bay.

The while that we the gangway o'er
Were pressing fast, amid the roar
Of sunset guns, the barge to sight
Again appeared that we had passed.
It touched the shore beneath the light
Of Roman candles ; 'mong the last
(I sheltered watched) to gain the shore
I, tremulous, beheld Lenore
Beside her well-remembered sire.
I thought that I had quelled desire
For her for aye. I did not know
My inner self, for when the glow
Of her sweet presence fell across
My path, like stubble dry, the moss
Of time and absence long away
Was burned, and all the embers gray
Of love fresh-fanned burst into flame.

I saw a change I could not name
Upon her face. I saw engraven
What clearly told me that the haven
Of peace and rest had not been won ;
A look begot of thoughts that run
In quest of fate ; such as is given
To those who, if unfed from Heave

Are nearing shadows of despair, —
The pale, rapt look that shows the wear
Of toil for agencies above
Without the recompense of love
Below ; such shadings you may trace
Upon the nun's uplifted face,
Or face of one who, love-lorn here,
Derives from hidden springs above
What is denied her in our sphere.
“Perchance some spark of old-time love,”
Said I, “disturbs her slumbers still,
And may be warring with her will.
Perchance fresh pleading on my part
Would find a lodgment in her heart.”

Small consolation ! I had vowed
Never to seek her, save if she
Advance should make by sending me
Some word of welcome. Beating loud,
My heart rebuked me sorely now
For making such a foolish vow.
Just then aboard their skiff they went,
And toward the isles their course they bent
Over reposeful waters, while
Like brilliants every cottaged isle

Appeared, and while the natal night
 Was radiant with the witching light
 Of brightening stars, and keen display
 Of fireworks shooting from the Bay.
 I sadly gazed, until my fair
 Was lost amid th' enchantment rare.

Imagine one who near the gate
 Of Heaven hath glimpse of streets of gold,
 And joys and glories manifold,
 But may not enter, held by fate
 In endless longing for the bliss
 Denied, because of deeds amiss ;
 Whose grief hath no alleviation,
 Because Him who could let him in
 He hath estranged by hurt and sin,
 That will admit no expiation.
 That fated one's forlorn position
 Is like unto my sad condition ;
 For cureless errors did I wait
 Unparadised, without the gate
 Of earthly bliss, ill-starred, undone
 With hopeless watching for the one
 Offended sore, who held the key
 To my life's lost felicity.

That man is father of his fate
Is the conclusion of the sages ;
His destiny he doth create ;
’Tis fruitage of his deeds, the wages
Of his own wisdom, or his folly.
One harvests mirth ; one melancholy.

“ But still a fairer, choicer crop
May spring from wiser, later planting.
So waste no time in vain recanting—
A consequence is hard to stop.
Plant aspirations that will flower
In whiter deeds and overtower
And shame your former, meaner doing ;
Win noble meed by noble wooing.

Though side by side awhile may live
The baser and the nobler fate,

This one will cease ill fruit to give,
And that will yield at wondrous rate.”

Thus caroled Hope in soothing strain
But Reason chanted back again

My woe : “ I see not how applies
This goodly promise to your case.
Your vows, which you may not efface,
Like lofty prison walls arise

To hinder planting for new fate.
 Some second sowing is too late,
 Alas for that ! you may not try
 Another planting, but must lie
 In self-made dungeon, where you feel
 That you have forged its bars of steel.
 Awhile you thought that worldly strife
 Would still the longings of your life.
 Your need of her seemed nearly slain
 By stress of business, toil for gain,
 And generous distribution,—lo !
 She, grave and queenly, passed across
 Your path ; the vision of your loss
 Renews the darkness of your woe.”

“ I would I were a bird, that I
 Might round her island arbors fly ;
 Then could I sing to her my woes.
 I would I were a breeze, that blows
 To her the music of the waves,
 To her the fragrance of the flowers ;
 I'd fill her ear with mournful staves
 Of song that fill my lonely hours,
 Whose burden is : ‘ I yearn, and yearn
 For signal that I may return.’

“ I would I were a vivid dream,
That like to a bewitching beam
Of moonlight, might her chamber gain,
The while her ripened charms were lain
In softest slumber ; I would woo
More ardently than e’er before ;
My penitence, my longing sore,
My deathless passion, all I’d throw
Into my pleading for repeal
Of her decree that kills my weal.

“ I’d plead : ‘ I know how just my fate ;
I planted coldness in your breast ;
But now, ah me ! I am oppressed
With endless winter, Arctic weather ;
The blow I gave you, light as feather,
Recoils on me a crushing weight.
But O, relent ! Be kind ! forgive
My past unknightly ways ! and now
Dispel the shadows from thy brow,
And smile on me, and let me live.’

“ As long as plaint of whip-poor-will
Floats sweetly o’er the water still,

Would I,—her loveliness anear—
Pour in her pure and pearly ear
My pleas, of desperation born,—
Would supplicate until the morn ;
And the refrain of every plea
That I could softly urge should be :
‘ In penitence I yearn and yearn
For token that I may return.”
Thus mused I, gazing where my fair
Was lost in the enchantment rare.

When morning came, arose Lenore,
And thus she mused : “ How I deplore
My waywardness ! A rankling sting,
’Tis true his negligence did bring.
But his repentance with disdain
I paid ; his missive plead again,—
I heeded not,—and now I find
That some unfailing power doth bind
My heart to him. At first I thought,
My wounded pride in me so wrought,
That I from him was wholly free.
My friends assurance gave to me
That I would soon forget the rover
Who first to me did play the lover.

They said, 'A boy has often dozens
Of sweethearts (most of whom are cousins),
To practice gallantries upon,
In preparation for the one
Rare princess of his heart, that he
Expects in all sincerity
To meet, and kneel before, and sue
In courtly phrase, as lovers do
In books and plays.' On me did pour
Such floods of love-belittling lore,
That the delights, all else above,
Of my remembered early love,
Were tarnished, like unto a sweep
Of vernal meadow, near the steep,
At times of all its beauty shorn
By turbid, chilling torrents, born
Amid the murky peaks above.
So smothered was my youthful love,
That for awhile, even after he
For reinstatement plead with me
A second time, I did not know
That it was still alive, below
The flood of pride and friends' advice,
Or that it could, within a trice,
All opposition sweep away
And reassume imperial sway.

“For love is a something that brooks no
control ;
Of life and of bliss 'tis the center and
soul,
'Tis a mystery deep as the unsounded seas,
And as native to hearts as are blossoms to
trees.

“There's no joy save in loving and doing,
—alone
Even God were unsated, though blazing
His throne
With rubies and rainbows,—bliss came
when employed
In filling with life the dread silence and
void.

And the artist, though seemingly happy
alone,
Communes with creations begot of his own
Imperial longings for something above
What his senses reveal, to worship and
love.

“Kind nature forever for each happy bird
A mate doth provide ; and until it is stirred

By the soft wooing zephyrs, the loveliest lake
Will never from dreaming with laughter
awake.

“ And never do meadow-land flowers unfold
Vernal glories, till wooed by the breath and
the gold
Of rare mornings ; and whisperings sweet of
the trees
Are responses to pressures of warm loving
breeze.

“ Yet still awhile I sought a face
That should forever take the place
Of his. Amid the whirl and dance
Of fashion, many a suitor's glance,
And smile, hand-pressure, word, and tone
I treasured, and, when quite alone
I them recalled, passed in review,
To separate the false from true ;
And of one man whose offerings seemed
The choicest, long I mused and dreamed,
In hope that he would grandly rise,
To manhood of heroic size,
Whose virtues would o'ershadow all
The others, and my heart enthrall.

I sought in vain—nor could erase
Within my heart one haunting face.

What deep chagrin was mine—that he,
Whose nature towered in majesty
Above all other men I knew,
Did for my hand no longer sue !
But who can understand a maid ?
Not even herself. On him I laid
The blame because at my own word
He left me, and at last deferred
To my decision,—what else could
He do, and act as wise man should ?

“ And then in varying mood I shift
The blame to him, because the gift
Supernal he does not display
Of knowing, though so far away,
My thoughts concerning him ; indeed.
I often wish that he were freed
From the restraints of this our time,
So that it would not be a crime
For him to seize me as his own ;
Or that the flower of time were blown
To-day, when men no more must take
Th’ initiative,—as certain sages

Foretell of swiftly-coming ages—
But maids will the proposals make.

“Ah me—my acts have long belied
My feelings! Oh, how I have tried
To be at rest apart from him!
My way forever grows more dim
And rough and dreary—were he nigh
It were not so, I often sigh.
Of what avail my deeds of love?
He is not near me to approve;
Though fully I renounce the gauds
Of senseless fashions,—he applauds
Me not—me miserable,—a nun
I seem to men, while to be one
With him—’twere rapture. Were he told
Of my contrition, would that old,
Sweet fondness lead him still to hold
My heart and hand in dear esteem?
Last night I saw him in a dream;
And his fond face did overflow
With love like that of long ago.
‘May I return?’ he asked. What bliss!
I yielded, but his clasp and kiss
Awoke me. O, ’twas joy,—then pain;
Life’s topmost peak—black gulf again!

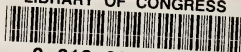
But he shall know how tends my stream
Of life,—I'll write to him my dream."

* * * * *

And now the gloom has cleared away ;
Life's sun is up ; the perfect day
Of life, love-crowned, doth on me shine ;
My lost Lenore a dream divine
Hath led to blend her life with mine.
On radiant wings the moments fly ;
Transfigured by her kindling eye
All life is glorious. All that woe
Is like a dreadful nightmare gone,
Is past, like tempest's gloom, whereon
Doth hang the calm's resplendent bow.
My sky is pearl without a stain,
And all earth's discords that remain
Are lost in life's full-rounded strain.

THE END.

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